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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the shortage of minority teachers and explores the high priority that exists among parents, teachers, and the business community to work toward a diversified teaching force, focusing on the U.S. Hispanic population and investigating whether minority teachers in the classroom can result in minority student success in school. The paper suggests that the extremely low percentage of minority teachers in public schools has led to a high dropout rate among minority students. The majority population generally has a difficult time understanding cultural differences. When this occurs, communication between students and teachers breaks down, leading to serious consequences. Teachers need to know how to respond to students in culturally appropriate ways. Statistics on Hispanic students show that only 50 percent will graduate from high school. Many educators agree that minority teachers are important to Hispanic students because they can act as role models, encourage students to perform better, better understand cultural differences, and break down the students' stereotypes. Colleges and universities must prepare future teachers for diversity, providing multicultural experiences and teaching students how to respond to a changing world. Universities must actively seek minority students and support them in their efforts to become teachers. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MINORITY TEACHERS ON MINORITY STUDENT SUCCESS

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The Effectiveness of Minority Teachers on Minority Student Success

Abstract

In this paper, the researcher focused on the shortage of minority teachers in the public schools and explored the high priority that exists among parents, teachers, and the business community to work towards a diversified teaching force. The minority group targeted most for this research was the Hispanic population in America. In studying this issue, the researcher tried to determine if a minority teachers' presence in the classroom could be linked to minority student success in school.

Most experts on this topic feel that it is necessary to have minority teachers teaching in all schools that serve minority student populations. The overwhelming argument is that these teachers will serve as positive role models for minority students. Some of the literature even claimed that minority teachers' presence is crucial even in schools where Anglos make up the majority of the student population. However, what real impact are minority teachers having on the academic achievement of minority students? Just as important, what real impact are they having on the academic achievement on Caucasian students? Having minority teachers in the classroom seems like the answer to improved success in the classroom and better multicultural attitudes in all students. This will be the primary focus of the research's study.

Introduction

Identification of Problem

Anyone remotely perceptive to current events in education knows that minority students do not do as well in school as Caucasian students. It is no surprise either that there are nationally more Caucasian teachers in the classrooms than there are minority teachers. School districts across this nation who serve large populations of minority students are spending thousands of dollars each year in the recruitment of minority teachers, yet they continue to have very little success in diversifying the teaching force. It is widely believed that the recruitment of minority teachers is crucial to producing higher academic achievement among minority students.

Significance of Problem

The extremely low percentage of minority teachers in the public schools has been blamed for the high drop out rate among minority students. This has sparked a frenzy of teacher recruitment programs all over the United States. Many incentives have been created to attract minority teachers into the public schools system in an effort to relieve this problem.

The Research Question

Will the increase of minority teachers in our nation's school districts increase the academic achievement and graduation rate of minority students?

Research hypothesis

If there is an increase of minority teachers in our nation's school districts, then the academic achievement of minority students will increase while the dropout rate decreases.

Limitations

There can be many ethnic groups identified within one large school district. An obvious limitation is that research information gathered about one particular ethnic group may tell an extremely different story from the research information gathered about another ethnic group. There are different factors that impact each minority group in explaining why the dropout rate is so high. It would be convenient to categorize the research compiled from each ethnic group under the umbrella of "minority population", but the results would be misleading. Therefore, the researcher's attempt will be to study the data available on the Hispanic population while occasionally using

information gathered from other ethnic groups to use as examples.

Independent and Dependent Variable

The independent variable is the minority teacher population and the dependent variable is the level of academic achievement and the dropout rate of minority students.

Minority Student Drop-outs

Many educators, parents, and the business community have been coming together to find ways to better meet the needs of students. It is unjust to continue teaching all students using mainstream Anglo realities. Not all cultures share the same ideas and values as the mainstream culture. The fact of the matter is that there has been a continual influx of diverse ethnic groups coming into the United States. This trend is putting a lot of stress on our educational system. Carrasquillo (1996) found the following:

> Students from diverse ethnic groups are placing unprecedented demands on teachers, administrators and the entire educational system of the United States. This diversity poses the need for educators to accept the cultures from which language minority students come, and to embrace the imperative to work through that understanding to help these students ease their

way into a new language and culture, while still retaining their own culture (p.25).

The literature claims that minority teachers can very effectively meet the learning needs of minority students because of shared deep cultural experiences. However, the simple fact is that the American public school system does not have enough minority teachers to meet the proportion of minority students in its classrooms. As a result there is a high dropout rate among minority students. According to Bains (1994), "Half of all Hispanics high school students will eventually drop out before they explore the opportunities that colleges have to offer, but either their lack of basic educational skills to enter universities or cultural and gender expectations at home makes college an unrealistic goal" (p. 19).

There are, in fact, a few Hispanic students who do overcome the statistics and pursue a post secondary education. However, there is a limited pool of minority teachers graduating from our nation's colleges and universities because the few minority students who graduate from college normally will not pursue a career in education. Minority students find very little academic and resource assistance during their first

year in college. Minority retention programs are extremely important in every university in an effort to retain their minority student population throughout the four years. "In spite of the existence of a body of knowledge regarding barriers to retaining students, few institutions demonstrate use of this knowledge in developing comprehensive retention programs specific to the needs of minority students" (Campbell, 1996, p. 298-303).

Successful recruitment programs are beginning to emerge in the struggle to increase the number of minority students in college. Some of these recruitment efforts are specifically designed to direct students toward a career in education. Middleton (1993) explores the PRIME Project lead by Morgan State University's School of Education and the Baltimore City Public Schools to recruit and inspire young minority students into teacher education. "In many states, efforts to recruit and retain minorities in teacher education include collaborative, partnerships between teacher preparation institutions and public school system…these linkages can be one of the most effective ways of achieving the goal of increasing the number of minority educators" (p. 11).

Many agree that the presence of minority teachers in the classroom will have a positive influence on the minority student population. However, will these minority teachers from diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds positively influence **all** students, including Anglo students? "Minority teachers are important, it is widely held, because they (a) serve as role models for minority and majority students, (b) may be better able to meet the learning needs of minority students, and (c) are often bilingual (especially in the Hispanic populace) and can help students transcend language barriers" (Piercynski, 1997, p. 205). The researcher will explore the affect minority teachers have on all students.

Teacher Shortage

A big concern in education is predicting who will be teaching our young children in the year 2000 and beyond. This concern surfaced about 10 to 15 years ago when it was apparent that there was a shortage of certified teachers in certain pockets throughout the nation, especially in the inner city schools. The teacher shortage existed in particular subject areas. It has become a struggle to find teachers who meet the minimum qualifications to teach in the areas of mathematics,

science, and bilingual education. Now these pockets have grown to include urban and suburban areas of the nation.

Another major concern has been the low number of minority teachers in the classroom. Some people began to predict today's huge decline of minorities entering the teaching force back in the mid 1980s. "Although there is disagreement over whether a real teacher shortage will materialize, educational leaders throughout the country agree that a massive shortage of minority teachers is imminent by the year 2000 unless some bold steps are taken to remedy the situation" (Greer, 1989, p. 8). Fifteen years later many are predicting the same for the future, "The severe decline in the number of African-American teachers during the 1990s will continue into the next century unless dramatic action is taken to reverse the trend" (Walling, 1994, p. 20). The nations educational leaders are hosting state and national conferences on this issue. Even the federal government is also doing its part and spending millions upon millions of dollars in hopes of increasing the number of minority teachers, but will all this be enough to create the results everyone is looking for?

Culture

Our culture is directly linked to our realities: the way we think, the way we act, and the way we live. Many of the cultural traditions and ceremonies held by different ethnic groups can be easily observed and studied, especially on certain holidays. However, there are aspects of deep culture that one will never experience unless immersed in it. This is something many of our teachers can not begin to comprehend. Johnson explains culture as, "a human invention that establishes meaning for us by integrating our knowledge, and perception of that knowledge, into the immediate world we can understand and feel comfortable within" (Hanson, 1996, p. 316).

One of the first lessons in multicultural education is accepting the fact that we are living in a diverse society. Once this reality is accepted then we can begin to compare the differences and similarities in the cultures around us. It is important to gain an understanding and appreciation for these variations even though they may be different from what one is used to. For example, the concept of the family is very different in the Hispanic culture compared to the Anglo culture.

The majority population generally has a difficult time noticing or even admitting that there are differences. While Anglo children are taught to be independent at a young age, Hispanic parents reinforce family unity and dependence as the foundation for survival. "The Mexican American and African American groups seemed to encourage children to identify with the family early in life and to remain so identified, while the Anglo group seemed to encourage children to consider themselves as separate individuals early in life" (Dilworth, 1992, p. 99).

When a teacher does not understand that these differences in the culture exist, communication breakdown begins to occur and unnecessary problems are created. "Young children are expected, even in the very first days of attendance at these schools, to perform their roles as pupils adhering to shared meanings of the broader American society" (King, 1994, p. 14-15). This is one reason must experts agree that it is vital to have minority teachers in all schools serving minority student populations. There are cultural patterns that some experts say exist in children from different ethnic groups that only adults from those specific groups can understand. By

understanding the patterns, these adults can better serve students needs. For example, if an Anglo teacher scolds a Latino student for fighting, that child's cultural instincts kick in and he will immediately look down at the floor. This response is learned within the Hispanic family structure to express shame for doing wrong and to show respect for the adult. In the majority culture, however, Anglo children know that they should look directly at their superiors in the eyes to show that they are listening carefully and respect the authority figure who is speaking to them. If the Anglo teacher in this situation is unaware of these cultural differences, she will immediately mistake the Latino student's natural response as rebellious in nature. This angry teacher, in many cases, will quickly label this child as disobedient and disrespectful towards authority figures. Genesee (1994) found that educators need, "...to accept the cultures from which language minority students come, and to embrace the imperative to work through that understanding to help these students ease their way into a new language and culture, while retaining their own culture" (p. 56-57).

Another classic example found in the literature is of a Chinese girl, Hong Kingston, trying to read out loud in front of the class and discovering a handicap about her culture and about herself:

> "It was when I found out that I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery. I did not speak and felt bad each time I did not speak. I read aloud in first grade, though, and heard the barest whisper with little squeaks come out of my throat. 'Louder,' said the teacher, who scared the voice away again. The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew that the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (Dyson, 1997, p. 128).

Just trying to understand cultural differences is not enough. Teachers need to respond accordingly to these differences. In this particular situation, the teacher could have taught the same material effectively, but in a way that was sensitive to the culture of the Chinese female population in her class. Instead, the teacher tries to force her cultural realities onto her Chinese students challenging them to defy their culture realities. Such conflict makes young children feel alienated and ashamed, and they begin to devalue their own home culture. "Teaching in ways that connect the students also requires an understanding of differences that may arise from

culture, language, family, community, gender, prior schooling, and the other factors that shapes people's experiences, as well as differences that may arise from the intelligences students rely on, their preferred approaches to learning, and any specific learning difficulties they may have" (Hammond, 1997, p. 295). Justifiably, minority teachers teaching children of their own ethnic group can instill pride and self-respect in their culture.

Positive Role Models

The current statistics on Hispanic high school dropouts in America is phenomenal. David Garcia, Assistant Director of Admissions at Bowling Green State University says, "Only 50% of Hispanics in the United States will graduate from high school and only 25% of those who do will go on to college" (personal communication, February 26, 1999). These statistics are alarming. Obviously schools can not continue doing what they have done to remedy this problem. Most who closely study this issue agree that minority teachers' presence in the classroom is crucial. "Some educators suggest that teachers of LCD (Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Children) should be selected from the same ethnic group as the children being taught. Such teachers could provide positive role models,

encourage children to perform better, and better understand and counsel children" (Garcia 1995). Further research has suggested that minority teachers in the classroom can serve another very important purpose. Minority teachers can serve as positive role models for the majority student Anglo population as well and break down the stereotypes that children pick up as they mature. "This situation (lack of minority teachers) also cheats non-minority students of the opportunity to see a cross section of people in leadership roles and of the opportunity to prepare to work cooperatively in our multiethnic workforce" (Middleton, 1993, p. 111).

Multicultural Education

Some focus should be put on what our colleges and universities are doing to prepare young teachers for the diversity that will be encountered in our nation's schools. The literature gives examples of classroom situations where teachers and diverse student populations struggle day after day because of their differences. Why are many teachers not able to cope with this diversity? Are they not being well prepared at the college level?

The literature explains that too many universities are cheating their teacher-education students out of the true multicultural experiences they are certain to encounter in many school districts across America. In place of incorporating a valuable, hand-on multicultural experience into their curriculum, universities will instead hold special workshops to lecture their students about multiculturalism. However, some teacher-education programs that do have a multicultural component are weak and do not properly prepare students well enough for the diverse environment many new teachers will experience their first year. "Teacher education programs must prepare future and current practitioners to teach in diverse classrooms. Practitioners have an ethical obligation to provide cultural balance in presentation and equal access to learning for all students" (Hegler, 1997, p. 74).

In order for a colleges and universities to have a strong multicultural program, they need to teach their perspective teachers to professionally respond to their changing environment and meet the needs of each individual student. "From a technical perspective, the purpose of multicultural teacher education becomes one of helping trainees acquire

technical mastery of knowledge and practices that will meet the needs of diverse learners" (Martin, 1995, p. 102). Research has been done to analyze patterns in learning-styles between the different cultural groups. Murray (1996) argues that, "The African-American student's culturally induced focus on people and social interactions rather than products or individual achievement may be one of the causes of lower levels of achievement in school" (p. 69). It is important that teachers are aware of these differences in learning patterns. This type of information is useful for all teachers to better understand the populations they serve. With this type of awareness teachers can be more conscious of how and what they are teaching to better serve each individual student in the classroom.

Good Teachers

If non-minority (Anglo) teachers were better prepared to teach a diverse population, sensitive to the students' learning-styles and alert to the cultural similarities and differences of all students, would there still be a strong need for minority teachers in the classroom? The researcher found unlimited information proving that minority teachers are better able to reach students in their own ethnic group because of the

deep culture they share. The literature has also clearly stated that minority teachers are crucial to the lack of minority role models for both minority and majority students. However, none of the literature has provided clear evidence that teachers from the majority culture can not be properly trained to effectively teach and serve a diverse student population.

Fortunately, there was consistency in the literature when describing the characteristics of good teachers. According to Garcia (1995), teacher candidates should possess the following characteristics when selecting the best teaching faculty for LCD *(linguistically & culturally diverse children)*: (p. 155).

1. Believe that cultural diversity is a worthy goal.
2. Respect the culture children bring to school.
3. Believe that the children's culture is worth preserving and enriching.
4. Appreciate cultural and linguistic differences as undeniable individual differences.
5. Be willing to learn more about the education of LCD children.
6. Have a positive self-concept.
7. Enhance the children's self-image.

8. Have confidence in the ability of LCD children to learn.

9. Have a positive attitude toward all children of any ethnic group, regardless of socioeconomic status.

If all teachers were taught these concepts, it is believed that our schools would not be in the trouble that they are currently in. Although many will argue that these concepts will not replace the cultural knowledge and experience minority teachers bring into the classroom, better prepared teachers would definitely alleviate many of the problems schools are experiencing.

Minority Teacher Recruitment

If people in higher education recognize the concern for having more minority teachers in the public schools, what are they doing to retain the minority students that they have successfully recruited into their teacher-education programs? In the area of recruitment, many universities in the nation are actively seeking minority students and offering competitive financial aid packets if they choose to pursue a career in education. "In many states, efforts to recruit and retain minorities in teacher education includes collaborative partnerships between teacher preparation institutions and

public school systems...these linkages can be one of the most effective ways of achieving the goal of increasing the number of minority educators" (Middleton, 1993, 37). The Ohio Department of Education alone has been awarded millions of dollars in grant money to spend over the next few years on programs created by public schools and universities committed to diversifying the teaching force in the state of Ohio. Institutions in Ohio who compete for this particular grant have created a variety of innovated and very effective programs. A total of (30) programs are being funded yearly. Basic programs like Future Teachers of America that can cost under $5,000 a year have received funding as well as programs requiring over twenty times that amount. These millions of dollars available through O.D.E. is made possible through a federal grant called Programs to Increase Diversity in Ohio's Teaching Force. Any institution of education can apply for these monies; however, this is a matching grant. Half of the total funds to institute a program must come from a cooperative effort between a school district and an institution of higher education. The Ohio Department of Education will then match the funds the two institutions have committed toward their collaborative

program. The program's efforts must focus on the diversification of the teaching profession.

While these types of programs may offer temporary relief, it is not a cure for the problem. Plenty of money will continue to be invested into these types of programs every year only to recruit a small amount of minority teachers. However, the core of the problem continues to be the high minority dropout rate in America. Money keeps being invested into programs targeting high school juniors and seniors, but many people do not realize that most minorities will have dropped out of school by that time. Most will never get the opportunity to participate in these excellent programs. To keep minority students in school, retention efforts need to be focused on children below the ninth grade. "Partnership efforts among institutions of higher education and school districts should focus on early identification of potential teacher candidates and on monitoring of students' performance throughout their schooling" (Dilworth 1992, p. 275). Only after we see the high school graduation rate increase among minority groups will we begin to see an increase of minority students going on to college, and ultimately into careers in education.

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